

NCBA CEO Tours Pennsylvania

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conomic stress. NCBA is focused on "enhancing that potential for profitability and viability in you, the beef producers," he said.

Beef producers have indicated that top issues include preserving their way of life, growing their business, and passing the farm or ranch on to next generation, "so when I go to work every day, that's top with me. As an organization, what we are about is how to identify tools that you can put in your toolbox to enhance your profitability."

NCBA philosophy "has been about market-driven solutions, less government, and a consumer focus on enhancing demand for our product," he said.

Stokes highlighted that NCBA is a producer-controlled organization. "I don't make policy, I just implement it," said Stokes. "I don't approve funding — that's what our producers do."

Sixty-three percent of NCBA's board of directors consists of cow/calf producers, 30 percent are cattle feeders, six percent are allied industry representatives, and one percent is packer representatives — a board that is "cattlemen controlled but industry inclusive. When we look at issues like beef safety today, everybody's at the table to figure out how we can produce a safer and more wholesome product."

NCBA contracts with the Cattlemen's Beef Board to carry out beef checkoff programs, which

are focused on enhancing demand.

This includes product development, such as the value-added cut or ready-to-eat products.

Growing beef demand also includes nutrition — identifying the nutrient benefits of beef and getting the message out. The NCBA has forged a strong partnership with the American Dietetic Association. The two organizations are developing a lean beef cookbook.

Stokes also highlighted NCBA beef safety research efforts. Feed additives, steam pasteurization techniques, and sanitizing systems on cattle going into the packing house are options under consideration.

NCBA representatives work to protect the business environment in Washington, D.C. Permanent repeal of the estate tax and small business incentives are part of their agenda. They also work to ensure producers retain property and land-use rights.

Environmental policy is also a concern, as NCBA representatives work with regulatory agencies to address water and air quality issues. In addition they pushed to enhance programs to help producers get more environmental dollars.

Marketing, a hot issue for producers, has prompted NCBA to work with the Chicago Mercantile Exchange on ways to improve using live cattle contracts as a risk management tool. Finding answers to establishing price and



Attendees of the town hall meeting in Lancaster included, from left, Paula Leuenberger and Scott Wright, Pennsylvania Beef Council (PBC) representatives; Carol Gillis, New York Beef Industry Council executive director; Michelle Cornman, Paul Slayton, and Holly Marshall, PBC; Terry Stokes, NCBA; Connie Kelley, executive secretary, N.Y. Beef Producers' Association; and William Leshner, Bob Livingston, and Bernard Nissley, PBC board members.

eliminating the inequities and volatility that is in the system today are priorities, he said.

NCBA has also worked with USDA on mandatory price reporting. "This marketing area, and price discovery, is one we must find the answer to," Stokes said.

Trade is another emphasis. "Globalization is here. How do

we manage trade?" he said.

"The philosophy we've had, and if you look at the policy that's established, it's about fair trade, not just free trade. If folks want access to the U.S., they need to give us access everywhere else.

"The biggest challenge in these treaties is ensuring that we have a level playing field."

Checkoff Litigation

The checkoff program stands in litigation in two cases, said Stokes. In Montana, in a district court in Billings, one case awaits the district court's judging. "We are anticipating a positive decision based on what we've seen in the evidence that has been presented," he said.

After a South Dakota district judge ruled the checkoff unconstitutional, the case was appealed to the 8th circuit court of appeals. "Briefs have been filed in the case, and we expect that it will be heard sometime after the first of the year," he said.

After a process of decisions and appeals, conflicting decisions will probably drive the case to the supreme court.

"We are very confident that in the end the beef checkoff will be

ruled constitutional, but we also know that we're in for a long trip," said Stokes.

The justice department, several cattlemen's organizations, and private citizens are underwriting litigation costs.

Of fourteen commodity checkoff programs today, seven are in litigation related to constitutionality.

Stokes addressed price discovery issue and lack of competition in the buying, packing, and retailing industries. Iowa Cattlemen have started a closed co-op to get more value for their product, he said, noting that "value must be passed back to producers."

Producers present discussed possible government subsidies for the beef industry, enforcing the Packers and Stockyards Act, the introduction of irradiated ground beef into stores and restaurants, captive supply/packer ownership of cattle, and the possibilities of country-of-origin labeling.

"NCBA is your organization," summarized Stokes. "The way to change policy is to get involved and to participate so that you can help make those decisions that form policy to move the industry forward," he said.

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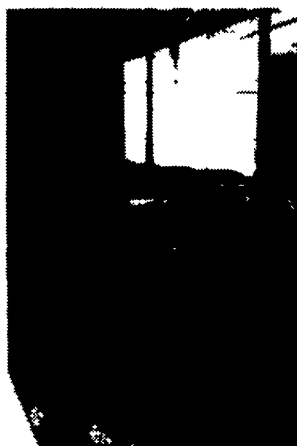
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